

The *ménage à trois* complexity of external supervision

Paul Flanagan – University of Waikato

Vivianne Flintoff – Waikato Institute of Technology



Locating ourselves

- Excusé moi! Please excuse our French...
- Practice background
 - Paul
 - Vivianne
- Ideas
 - Social constructionism
 - Analysis of power relations
 - Narrative supervision practices



Pathways to today's presentation

- NZAC Conference

- Flintoff, V., & Flanagan, P. (2009, September). *Exploring the landscapes of external supervision*. Workshop presented at the NZ Association of Counsellors' Conference, Hamilton, New Zealand.

- NZJC Article

- Flintoff, V. & Flanagan, P. (submitted February 2010). Exploring the landscapes of external supervision. *NZ Journal of Counselling*.
- Troubling taken for granted ideas of external supervision dyad
- That closer collaborative 3-way relationships can better serve the purposes of external supervision

Background

- Concern about accountability and responsibility of external supervision – our experience
- Critique and interrogation of taken-for-granted ideas about the ‘sacrosanct’ nature of the supervision dyad
- Social work literature encouraged our further exploration of our critique of the dyad relationship
- Surprise response from others e.g. social workers
- Mixed responses from counsellors and counselling supervisors:
 - Don’t touch it!
 - Good on you.

Foreground – Practitioners, supervisors, agency (managers)

- Relationships – who are the partners in a ménage à trois?
 - What are the ethical challenges to be considered ?
 - Responding to some calls to the professions
 - Current managerial and economic contexts
- Making explicit the implicit
 - This relationship of three already exists: how are we going to attend to this reality in ways that better serve the purposes of external supervision?



Partner Relationship Development

- Threading
 - Values
 - Ethics
 - Pragmatics
- Through the three-way relationships



A (professional) Household of Three

- Professional spaces
 - Not sleeping partners or ‘in your pocket’
 - Independent and interdependent
- Patterns of relationship
 - Two’s company; three’s a crowd?
 - Collaborative and collegial
 - Individual roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, that are enacted in overtly acknowledged relationships with each other



Questions: Accountabilities & Responsibilities

- Questions for the individual professional about their relating with the professional other/s
- Questions that speak to the concerns and hopes of the professional – practitioner; supervisor; manager



Supervisor

- What is my responsibility to the:
 - Practitioner?
 - Clients and their whanau?
 - Agency?
 - E.g. Agency report? Meeting with agency? When? Where? Why? How often?
 - Profession?
- How do I understand the relationship with the agency?
- How does the agency understand the relationship with me?
- How are power/agency politics addressed?
- Who do I talk with if I have concerns about the practitioner/a client/someone in the agency?



Benefits to supervisors

- Closer collaborative relationships better facilitate:
 - An understanding of the context of the practitioner and their work,
 - Interactions with the agency
- Leading to:
 - Increased support for the practitioner,
 - Shared responsibility for the practice work with the client
 - Clearer understanding of the supervision provision



Practitioner

- What forms of external supervision are going to provide the best service for me?
- What relationship would I prefer between the external supervisor and the agency? And why?
- Who decides who my external supervisor is?
- As the 'payers for supervision' what could/should my agency expect to know?
- Who is responsible for negotiating the supervision agreement?

Benefits to practitioner

- Reassurance and knowledge that agency / manager and supervisor are better positioned to support practitioner
- ‘Evidence’ of increased understanding, support, monitoring of practice, and professional development opportunities



Agency (Manager)

- How do I know that the supervision is effective and useful?
- Is this supervision value for money?
- Is this supervisor doing what I expect the supervisor to be doing?
- How do I know the practitioner is making 'good' use of supervision?
- How will I know if there is something I should know? And what could these things be?
- What are the contractual requirements for external supervision?
- How does the supervisor understand the relationship with the agency?



Agency (Manager) continued...

- How are power relations (e.g. agency politics, within supervision) addressed?
- Who decides who the supervisors are and why?
- What does the agency want in the supervisor? Skills, knowledge, training - compatibility with the agency values, theoretical approaches, professional codes
- What relationship do I as service manager have with the external supervisor? And what relationship should/could there be?
- How might the external supervisor understand that we share responsibility in supporting the practitioner and their practice?

Benefits to agency / manager

- Knowledge that the supervision service provides what is contracted for
- Safety of practice
- Safety for the practitioner
- Knowing of effective client work
- Assurance



Our Noticings:

- Appreciation by each professional for the closer collaborative relationship
- Reassurance and knowledge that the supervision service is providing what is hoped for and paid for
- Hopes are not assumed but made explicit within the ménage à trois relationship
- Retains the strengths of the dyadic relationship and addresses the worries that confidentiality and privacy might be undermined
- Better serves the purposes of external supervision

Conclusion:

Common threads, different patterns

- Different pattern is the ménage à trois
- External supervision is usefully shaped as an explicit three way relationship
- Ménage à trois is shaped by values, ethics, and pragmatics threading through contracting conversations and subsequent interactions
- The common threads are woven through the relationships and interactions by each partner, together weaving the pattern we call external supervision – welcome to the ménage à trois.

Paul Flanagan

Department of Human Development & Counselling

The University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105

Hamilton, New Zealand

www.waikato.ac.nz



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Vivianne Flintoff

School of Social Development

Waikato Institute of Technology

Private Bag 3036

Hamilton, New Zealand

www.wintec.ac.nz



Wintec

WAIKATO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Te Kuratini o Waikato